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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 8665  
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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3109  
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 0503  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 3311  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3738  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 5094  
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 0189  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 0125  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5746  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0354  
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 0971  
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO 2169  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LA PAZ 003215

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2017  
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [BL](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#)  
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION REELS AT EVO'S CONSTITUTION

REF: LA PAZ 3209

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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SUMMARY  
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11. (C) The December 9 passage of President Evo Morales' MAS party constitution has left regional opposition reeling. In a nationwide address carried by private television networks Sunday, Santa Cruz Prefect (governor) Ruben Costas publicly rejected the proposed constitution and announced that Santa Cruz will present its own autonomy statutes on December 15. Opposition contacts around the country denounce the constitution as illegal and divisive but are not sure what steps to take next. Five opposition prefects are meeting in Cochabamba December 10 to coordinate efforts. The news of the passage of the MAS constitution has polarized the country. Violence would be most likely to break out in fractured departments (states) such as Cochabamba or Chuquisaca or in ultra opposition area like Beni and Pando departments. Confrontations could occur in Santa Cruz if the government attempts to assert control while the MAS controlled departments La Paz, Oruro, and Potosi are likely to stay calm for the moment. End Summary.

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REACTION AROUND THE COUNTRY - SANTA CRUZ  
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12. (C) On the evening of December 9 Santa Cruz Prefect Ruben Costas addressed the nation in a live television broadcast carried by most private networks but not the government network. Governor Costas characterized the day's earlier events as "illegal and a farce." He announced that on December 15 Santa Cruz would present its own autonomy statutes. Costas complained that the constitution represents the political view of one party and said that "with absolute

democratic conviction and on behalf of our dignity and liberty we soundly reject it." Santa Cruz Civic Committee contacts tell Emboff that they need time to regroup and make decisions about the next steps they will take. In the meantime, the hunger strike in the main Santa Cruz square continues, although contacts admit "it gets us nothing." CAINCO (business federation) President Gabriel Dabdoub told Emboff that opposition leadership is "disgusted" by a lack of international concern over illegal and undemocratic process.

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IN TARIJA  
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13. (C) Tarija Civic Committee contacts feel they are at a loss as to how to respond. One of the directors told Emboff that "the early approval of the constitution really took the air out of our sails." While the committee is studying possibly disrupting natural gas lines to Argentina and the interior of the country, the recent military occupation of gas installations makes it difficult. Another member of the Tarija Civic Committee summed it up by saying "the government has opened so many fronts, it is hard to come up with a strategy."

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AND IN COCHABAMBA  
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14. (C) Oscar Zurita, President of the Cochabamba Civic Committee, told Emboff that "it was awful the way the constitution was approved; there was no participation for

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other sectors. We profoundly reject the way the MAS did this." Zurita said the committee would hold an emergency meeting to determine what measures they would take (Note: Five opposition prefects are meeting in Cochabamba today, December 10. End note.) The president of the Cochabamba Business Federation Rudy Rivera told Emboff that "we are very upset and very worried." Rivera said the Federation does not know whether to participate in the constitutional referendum. "There is so much confusion at the moment," he said, "we need to meet with our membership to try to make decisions."

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ELSEWHERE  
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15. (C) Potosi Mayor Renee Joaquin's Alianza Social (AS) secretary told Emboff that they are "completely against the

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draft constitution and the illegal manner in which it was approved. We fought for the constituent assembly and for democracy and we were betrayed." In Chuquisaca, the immediate reaction of the Inter-Institutional Committee was not to recognize the new MAS constitution and to call the MAS actions illegitimate. There is an ongoing debate within the committee as to whether to participate in the constitutional referendum as this "would lend legitimacy to something which is totally illegitimate and illegal."

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) With the Constituent Assembly called to reconvene with less than the 24-hour required advance notice on a Saturday night in a city three hours drive from the nearest airport, the regional opposition was caught unprepared. Reaction the day after is one of mourning and despair amongst the opposition, while the MAS faithful partied in the streets of Oruro. While hunger strikes and public complaints of illegality continue, the opposition admits those tactics yield little. The atmosphere countrywide is charged and

there is a strong possibility that any small event (even misinterpreted) could spark violent protests, especially in politically divided areas such as Cochabamba or strong opposition outposts like Beni, Pando, and Santa Cruz departments. End Comment.

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